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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000530

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: PREL KPAO KDEM KMPI XF TU

SUBJECT: GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE: YOUNG TURKISH FOREIGN-POLICY ACADEMICS SKEPTICAL NOT OF U.S. MOTIVES BUT OF SUCCESS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR EDELMAN'S MEETING WITH A GROUP OF ISTANBUL ACADEMICS PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO GAUGE REACTIONS OF INFORMED INTERLOCUTORS TO THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE. SEVERAL WARNED OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES, AND OTHERS WONDERED IF THE PROPOSED COMMITMENT COULD BE SUSTAINED. NOTABLE FOR THEIR ABSENCE WERE EXPRESSIONS OF MORAL INDIGNATION ABOUT THE ARAB/ISRAELI PROBLEM AND SUSPICIONS OF U.S. MOTIVES IN WANTING TO TRANSFORM THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST. "GOOD LUCK!" THEY SAID, IN EFFECT. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) AT A FEBRUARY 27 BREAKFAST HOSTED BY THE CONSUL GENERAL, SIX RISING STARS OF TURKISH UNIVERSITY FOREIGN-POLICY/INTERNATIONAL-RELATIONS FACULTIES MET WITH AMBASSADOR EDELMAN, WHO SKETCHED OUT FOR THEM THE GENESIS OF THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST INTIATIVE AND INVITED THEIR REACTIONS.

¶3. (SBU) HAKAN YILMAZ (BOGAZICI UNIVERSITY; PH.D IN POLITICAL SCIENCE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, 1996) RECALLED THE ANNULMENT OF ALGERIA'S ELECTIONS AND THE SUBSEQUENT BLOODSHED IN ASKING THE RHETORICAL QUESTION: "IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S IN THE BOX, DO YOU WANT TO OPEN IT?" THERE IS NO RELIABLE OPINION POLLING IN THE ARAB WORLD, HE SAID. THE RESULTS OF ELECTIONS MIGHT NOT BE TO THE U.S.'S LIKING. THAT SAID, IT IS MORALLY A GOOD THING TO TRY TO BRING DEMOCRACY TO THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER WE IN THE WEST (NOTE: HE INCLUDED TURKEY. END NOTE.) HAVE THE WILL, THE MONEY, AND THE STAYING POWER FOR THE "SOCIAL ENGINEERING" THAT WOULD BE REQUIRED. AN OSCE-TYPE ORGANIZATION FOR THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST MIGHT HELP, BUT EXPERIENCE IS NOT ENCOURAGING; NOTHING HAS COME OF SIMILAR EFFORTS BEFORE, BE THEY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA OR THE ARAB WORLD ITSELF.

¶4. (SBU) GUL SOSAY (BOGAZICI UNIVERSIY; PH.D. IN POLITICAL SCIENCE, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, 1999) COMMENTED THAT "DEMOCRACY" - I.E. A SYSTEM FOR ELECTING OFFICEHOLDERS - IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO TRANSFORM THE GME COUNTRIES INTO HAPPIER PLACES. THEY NEED JOBS, EDUCATION, AND INFRASTRUCTURE. HOW IS THE U.S. GOING TO IMPLANT DEMOCRATIC VALUES/SYSTEMS IN SOCIETIES BEREFT OF THEM? EVIDENTLY, IRAQIS COULD NOT BE MADE TO APPRECIATE THE VALUE OF "CAUCUSES." ONE CAN PRAISE AND PROMOTE GRASS-ROOTS INSTITUTIONS AND NGO'S, BUT HOW DOES ONE FOSTER THEM AMONG PEOPLE WHO ARE CONDITIONED BY DECADES, IF NOT CENTURIES, OF LOOKING ONLY TO THE STATE FOR SOLUTIONS? IF THE U.S. IS SERIOUS ABOUT BRINGING LITERACY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, GOOD GOVERNANCE, ETC. TO THE REGION, WHAT ROLE IN THAT EFFORT DOES IT ENVISION FOR THE UNITED NATIONS?

¶5. (SBU) UMUT OZKIRIMLI (ISTANBUL BILGI UNIVERSITY; PH.D IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, ISTANBUL UNIVERSITY, 1998) ASKED HOW THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE WOULD TAKE ACCOUNT OF LATENT AND WIDESPREAD ANTI-AMERICANISM, ESPECIALLY IF DEMOCRATIC REFORMS BRING ANTI-AMERICAN ELEMENTS TO POWER? HAS THE U.S. WEIGHED THE CHANCES OF SUCH AN OUTCOME? WHY WILL THE U.S.'S CLAIM TO BE HELPING THESE COUNTRIES BE TAKEN AT FACE VALUE, RATHER THAN VIEWED WITH SUSPICION? SOME EUROPEAN INTELLECTUALS NOW EVEN TALK OF "DEMOCRATIC COLONIALISM."

¶6. (SBU) AHMET HAN (ISTANBUL BILGI UNIVERSITY; PH.D, ISTANBUL UNIVERSITY, 2001) EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE POTENTIAL OF THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE TO UNLEASH IRREDENTISM. IF YOU BRING

DEMOCRACY, YOU WILL INVITE PEOPLE TO QUESTION THEIR COMMITMENT TO CURRENT BORDERS OF NATION-STATES; HE SPECIFICALLY CITED JORDAN AND KUWAIT. HE ALSO OPINED THAT AMERICANS' PSYCHOLOGY TRADITIONALLY UNDERESTIMATES THE SALIENCE OF HISTORICAL GRIEVANCES. HE ILLUSTRATED HIS POINT WITH AN ANALOGY: GIVE A SURPRISE "INFUSION" OF \$100 TO A COUPLE OF AMERICANS; TO THE AMERICANS, ALMOST ANY DIVISION OF IT WILL BE CONSIDERED ACCEPTABLE, BECAUSE BOTH PARTIES WILL BE GETTING A NET BENEFIT. IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST, HOWEVER, RECIPIENTS WILL PRIMARILY CONSIDER THEIR FEELINGS ABOUT THE OTHER RECIPIENT IN DECIDING WHAT IS FAIR AND THUS ACCEPTABLE.

17. (SBU) BULENT ARAS (FATIH UNIVERSITY; PH.D, BOGAZICI UNIVERSITY, 1998) ALSO SPOKE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF BORDER DISPUTES ERUPTING AS A CONSEQUENCE OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST. IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT PEOPLE THINK, DON'T BE OBSESSED WITH POLLS; GO TO THE MOSQUES. (NOTE: FATIH IS AN ISLAMIST-ORIENTED UNIVERSITY. END NOTE.) IT IS HARD TO APPEAR CONSISTENT, AND THEREBY AVOID THE ACCUSATION OF DOUBLE STANDARDS, WHEN CHOOSING BETWEEN SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY. IF YOU REALLY WANT SECURITY, YOU WILL ULTIMATELY LET KARIMOV DO WHAT HE WANTS IN UZBEKISTAN. IF YOU REALLY WANT DEMOCRACY, YOU WILL SUPPORT DISSIDENTS ONLY TO FIND THAT THEIR EFFECTIVENESS DIMINISHES IN PROPORTION TO THEIR IDENTIFICATION WITH THE U.S. "YOU SHOULD HAVE LEFT SAAD EDDIN IBRAHIM IN JAIL A LITTLE WHILE LONGER," HE QUIPPED, REFERRING TO THE CASE OF THE EGYPTIAN-AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

18. (SBU) IN RESPONDING TO THESE AND OTHER OBSERVATIONS MADE BY THE TURKISH ACADEMICS, THE AMBASSADOR HIGHLIGHTED SEVERAL THEMES. FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, GME COUNTRIES WERE FOR A LONG TIME NOT HELD TO THE SAME STANDARDS OF DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE. THIS HAS NOW CHANGED. IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST, WE ALL DIAGNOSE THE SAME PROBLEMS; TO DO NOTHING ABOUT THEM IS NOT AN OPTION. AMERICANS ARE NOT GOING TO BE DISSUADED BY THE "PROBLEMATIC" NATURE OF THE INITIATIVE. WE ARE NOT ATTEMPTING TO IMPOSE ANYTHING ON THE REGION. THERE IS NO DETAILED BLUEPRINT FOR THE INITIATIVE. RATHER, THERE IS A COMMITMENT TO FINDING WAYS AND MEANS TO HELP WHERE WE CAN BY CREATING AN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO, AND SUPPORTIVE OF, CHANGE EMANATING FROM THE REGION. IN ORDER TO DO THAT, WE NEED TO ADAPT EXISTING INSTRUMENTS TO SUPPORT DEMOCRATIC REFORM AND DEVELOP NEW ONES. THE AMBASSADOR RECOUNTED AN ANECDOTE FROM AN ARAB AMBASSADOR IN ANKARA, WHO WAS LISTENING TO A HARANGUE ABOUT U.S. MEDDLING IN THE REGION WHEN HE INTERRUPTED TO ASK: ARE WE HAPPY WITH THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN OUR COUNTRIES, WITH OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS, OUR ECONOMIES, OUR HEALTH-CARE SYSTEMS? IF SOMEBODY IS OFFERING TO HELP US, SHOULDN'T WE BE GRATEFUL FOR THE OFFER?

19. (SBU) COMMENT: A HESITANT, QUIZZICAL AND SOMEWHAT SKEPTICAL REACTION BY TURKISH ACADEMICS TO THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE IS TO BE EXPECTED. IT IS PARALLELED IN THE TURKISH MEDIA. THIS IS PARTLY BECAUSE THE GME INITIATIVE HAS NOT YET BEEN DEFINED IN DETAIL. WE SAW SOMETHING SIMILAR AT AN EARLIER MEETING BETWEEN THE AMBASSADOR AND ELEVEN REPRESENTATIVES FROM PROMINENT ISTANBUL-BASED NGOS. AFTER THE AMBASSADOR HAD EXPLAINED THE ADMINISTRATION'S THINKING BEHIND THE GME INITIATIVE, HE WAS MET BY AN INITIAL SILENCE THAT SEEMED TO underscore THE REPRESENTATIVES' HESITATION TO ENGAGE ON THE TOPIC. HOWEVER, THEY SOON WARMED UP TO IT. WHAT IS WORTH NOTING IS THAT AMONG TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY THINKERS THE GME INITIATIVE IS NOT REFLEXIVELY VIEWED IN KNEE-JERK FASHION AS SOME KIND OF PLOY DESIGNED TO SIDETRACK THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE OR INFILTRATE FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS. THE FOCUS IS ON SECURING TURKEY'S INTERESTS - NOT THE INTERESTS OF ARABS OR THE INTERESTS OF FUNDAMENTALIST MUSLIMS. END COMMENT.
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